



Raising Back Yard Chickens

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Master Gardener Program

How I got started

- Raised chickens, ducks, turkeys, geese, pheasants, peacocks, quail, since 1986
- Attended Backyard Chicken seminar at MG Advanced Ed Conf
- Read Jessi Bloom's book

- Not for CE
 - Animal husbandry



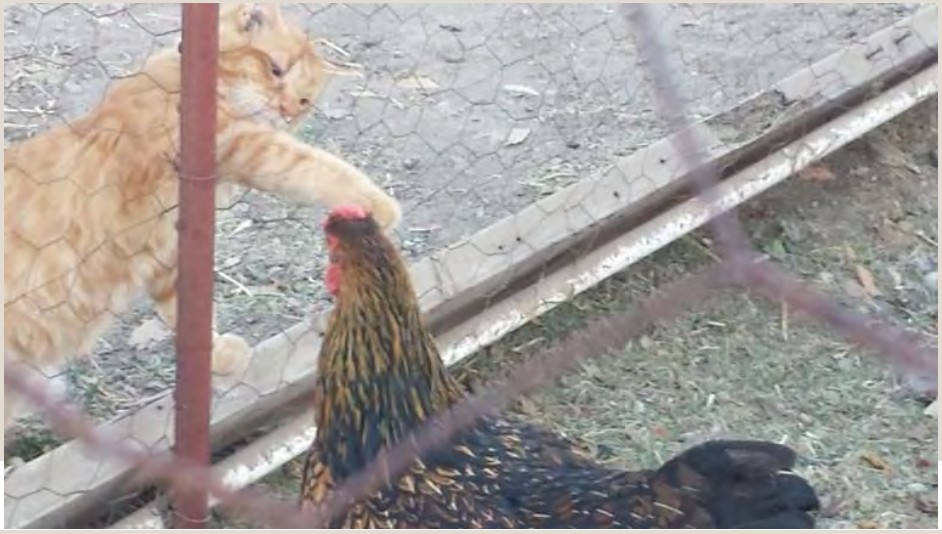


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Why Raise Chickens

- Pets with "benefits"
- Healthy protein rich food source
- Source of fertilizer
- "Garden helpers"
- Teach children responsibility
- Enjoyable hobby
 - Entertaining
 - Calming





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Where to begin?!?

- Research first / make wise decisions
- Visit local feed store / peruse chicken section
- How much do you want to spend?
- Create a plan
 - drawings to scale of existing structures
 - chart sun exposure, nearness to fence line
- Visit friends who have chickens – ask questions
- Check city ordinances – roosters - numbers
- Your time commitment / be realistic

Other aspects

- Be aware of your environment and any potential predators
 - Dogs can attack chickens
- Keep them safe
- Most chickens are "skittish"



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What type of enclosure?

- Full time free range
 - Plant damage – chickens need to be managed!
 - Roost in trees or under bushes
 - Predator free – finding eggs
- Part time free range
 - Forage during day - return to coop at night
- Occasional free range – only out under supervision
- Confined range – large runs fenced areas or paddock system with several runs
- Tractored – movable coop with floorless pen
- Confined – coop and small run

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Garden Helpers

- Manage weeds & pests
- Droppings fertilize soil
- Aerate the soil - scratch
- Compost greens & food waste (little recyclers)
- Manage area
 - Assure barriers to young plants



My Girls in the Raspberries

- Rockie
- Buffy
- Rhoda
- Goldie

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How many chickens to buy?

- What can your infrastructure support
- Urban limits 3-5
 - No roosters
- How many eggs can your family consume
- Plan for some loss



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Chicken Life Cycle



- Chickens life span 6-7 years
 - Stop laying after 3-4 years
- Egg – fertilized 21 days to hatch
- Chick – soft down then grow feathers
- Pullet – immature female < 1 year
 - lay eggs at 6-8 months old
 - # eggs depends on breed 50-300/year
 - 1 every 24/36 hours
- Hen – mature female
- Rooster – male chicken



Selecting the Breed





- Do you want egg or meat birds?
- Over 100 varieties
- Heritage breeds
- Egg layers – White Leghorn
- Meat birds – Cornish cross
- Dual purpose - many
- Show birds – small bantams, crested or feathered legs/feet



Dual purpose breeds

- Buff Orpington
- Barred Plymouth Rock
- Rhode Island Red
- Wyandotte - golden
- Ameraucana / Araucana
- Many others









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Care of chicks

- Buy day old chicks
 - free run or sexed
- Protect in bin, box, crate
 - cover - no predators (cats)
- Keep warm – heat lamp
- Waste collection
 - newspaper & wood shavings
- Water – fresh & clean
- Food – chick starter
 - small size, Rx
 - extra nutrients





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Let nature take it's course



Free range chickens
Mom does all the work

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Teenage Chickens

- Once feathered
 - slowly adjust to outside
- Change to layer food
 - granules then pellets
 - extra calcium for egg production
 - grit helps digest food
- Rotate new in every 2 years
- Adjust new pullets to hens slowly
 - "pecking order" is real!





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Transitioning

- Introduce greens
- "Feathered garbage disposals"
 - Feed vegetable kitchen scraps
 - Damaged or extra garden produce
 - Grass clippings
 - Don't feed strong foods - onions



The Chicken Coop

- Buy existing or be creative & make your own
- Functional for both you & the chickens
- Size based on number of chickens
 - 1 chicken needs 3-10 sq ft
- Decide location if permanent or moveable
 - Provide for shade in summer
 - Protect from wind in winter
- Easily accessible to you / water / power
- Coop & run together or free range

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Chicken Coop



OR
Deal with what you have



- Structure for large flock
 - Straw for bedding
 - Feed – Grant's mash
 - Close to water source

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Coop features

- Roof
 - slanted best
- Floor – many choices
 - metal, concrete, gravel
 - Wood with vinyl on top
 - Needs to be kept clean
- Doors
 - Man door
 - Chicken door
 - Chicken ladder
- Windows – ventilation





Coop requirements

- Nesting boxes
 - 1 sq ft – 2 chickens
 - Like dark enclosed space
 - Refresh litter often
- Hatch door - easy to collect eggs daily







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Coop requirements

- Roosting bar
 - 1’ off the ground
 - 1 linear foot per chicken
 - Bedding pans below easily removed to clean
 - Add fresh straw





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Lots of choices!











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Chicken run or paddock

- Enclosures
 - Part of coop
 - Separate fenced area
- Single run
- Multiple paddocks





Winter Home
Near garage
electricity

Spring, Summer,
Fall Home
In the garden

Fencing

- Permanent perimeter fence
 - Minimum 4’-6’ high
 - Metal posts – chicken wire
 - Cover with netting
 - predator birds
 - Barrier at the base
- Temporary – sturdy woven cloth
- Green fence – hedge row
 - Arbovitae - Boxwood
- Gates – hinge latch



New spring greens are like “chicken candy”

Misc items

- Noise – Roosters crow
 - hens after laying egg "cackle berries"
- Clean coop on regular basis – ammonia smell
 - Straw bedding & manure layered into compost – add nutrients
 - Do not apply fresh to plants – too hot!





Misc items

- Water fresh bi-weekly
 - Place on block – elevated easier for hens to reach
 - Gets green slime in summer
 - add 1 tbsp cider vinegar /gallon of water – algae
 - In winter heated waterer
- Add bulb for heat but also 14-16 hours of light
 - Use automatic timer easiest
 - time before dawn
 - increases egg production



Misc items

- Molting
 - starts when hen is about 18 months old
 - usually in the fall
 - loose feathers - ugly
 - decreased egg production
 - lasts several weeks
 - is longer as bird gets older

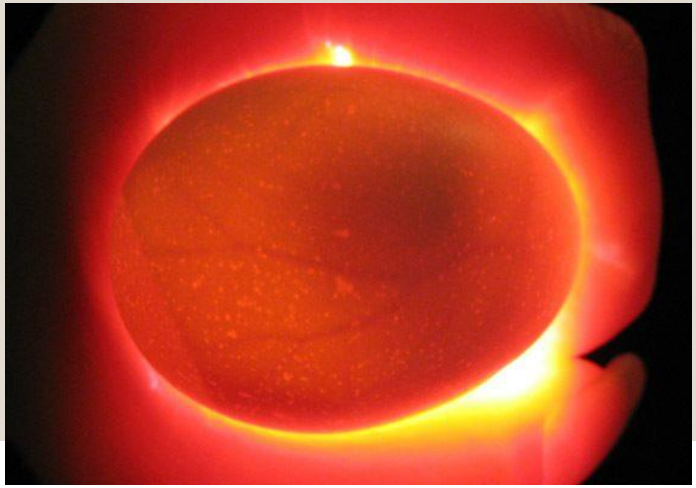




Misc items

- Hens that get “broody”
- Take them off the nest
 - may need to repeat
- If have a rooster and want chicks
 - Allow hen to sit on clutch of eggs
 - Can “candle” eggs to see if fertilized > 7 days
 - See small dark spot with spider webbing





Misc items

- Eating greens causes yolks to be bright yellow
- Can also be part of their pellets – Layena Marigolds
- What to do with the eggs
 - Place in carton pointed end down
 - Don't wash off "bloom"
 - Will keep for months
 - Give carton as gift





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Create Chicken Garden

Food Forest biodiversity

- Layers of plant materials
 - Over story – trees
 - Evergreens
 - dry underneath – shelter/dust baths imp
 - Ex: Alder, Western red cedar
 - Fruit trees - deciduous
 - shade in summer
 - drop fruit in fall to eat
 - Ex: Mulberry



Assure water to all plantings

Chickens need to be managed – tender greens

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Chicken Garden

- Shrubs
 - Protection/shade/woody
 - Jerusalem artichoke
 - Bayberry, sunflower
- Perennials
 - Hardy/herbaceous
 - Ornamental grasses
- Annuals
 - Edible / Self seeding
 - Attract insects
 - Nasturtium, borage

Which environment do you think a chicken would prefer?





Prison yard or Paradise!

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Chicken Habitat

- Ground cover
 - Provides greens
 - Spreads quickly
 - Erosion & mud control
 - Clover/vetch
 - Wheatgrass/cat mint/dandelion
- Other features
 - Bug log
 - Structure to roost
 - Shiny objects



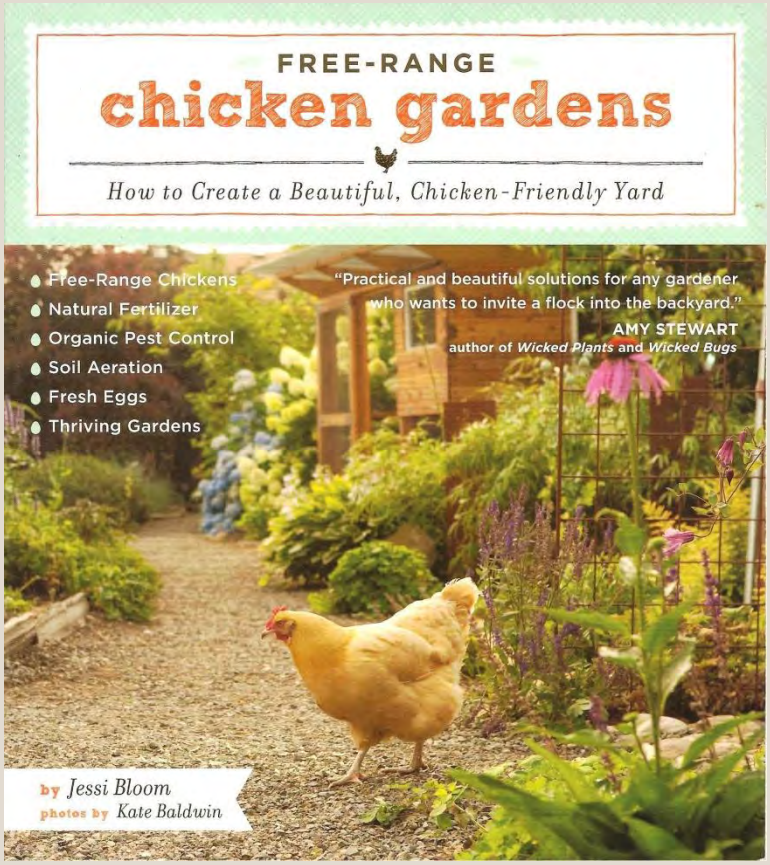


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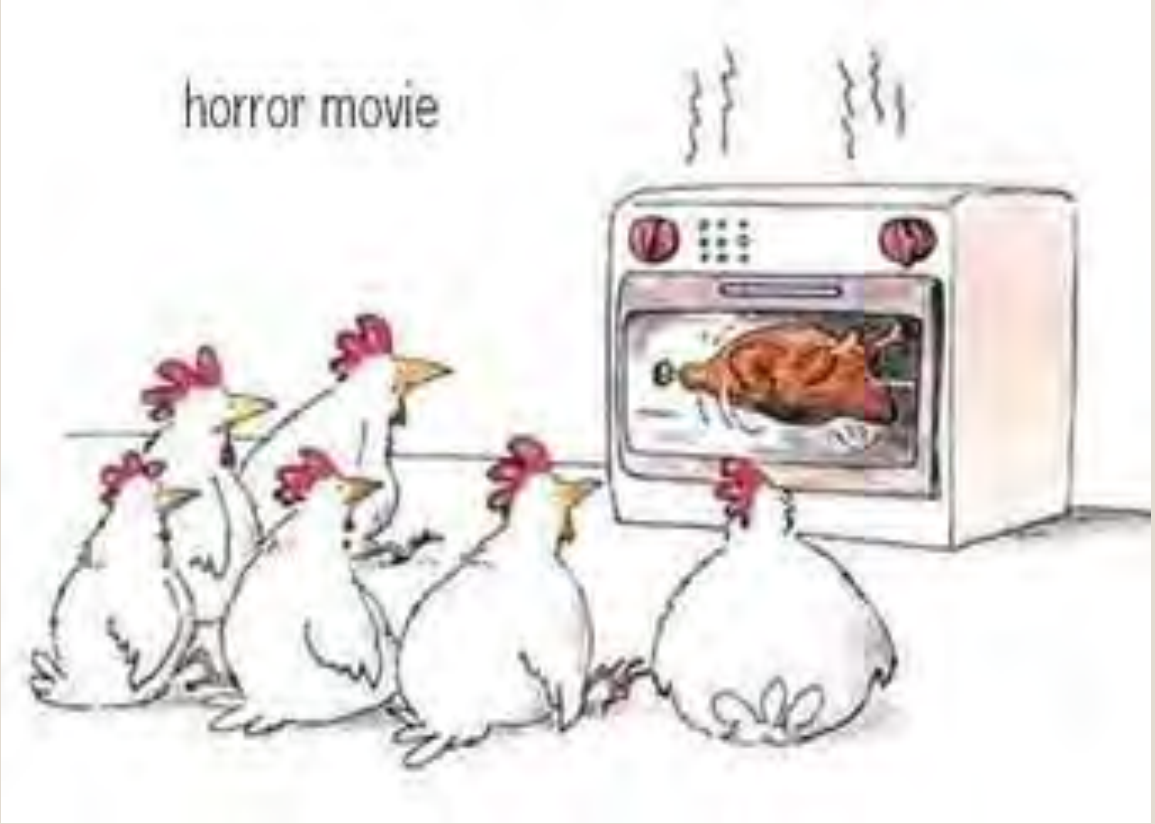
Jessie's Book







Any Questions?





Enjoy amazing fresh eggs!

Thank You

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